

Oh...Maija writes about BorgSpace, and she's okay,
Paramount owns Star Trek; and in the Traks world of A. Decker I play.

In Space, No One Can Hear You Panic

Stardate: 45628483020406483.4
Captain's Log, USS Secondprize

For some reason that stardate doesn't look right. I don't know why Starfleet uses that insane dating system when something like "November 11, 2372" would work just as well. After all, Terra is the head of the Federation, so why can't we Starfleet peons use planetary dates?

Speaking of peons, Starfleet has decided that the crew of the Secondprize would be best to test their latest in anti-Borg technologies. With the war with the Dominion currently stalemated, more or less, the think-tanks are starting to look over their shoulder at the Borg. I personally think it is useless, after all, if ONE cube just about destroyed the fleet, then the hundreds or thousands that have to exist will roll over the Federation when the Borg get around to assimilating us. Perhaps we should introduce the Dominion to the Borg....

Anyway, the tech-heads have been messing with our deflector dish for the past week at Starbase 12. They claim that the technology works, but the energy beam hasn't actually been tested. We're supposed to go out and shoot some rocks to see if there are any negative effects which happen when the beam actually interacts with matter. I figure that they figure that if anything happens to us, there will be nothing lost; and that it will simply be a line of research to abandon. Lucky us.

Bring on the asteroids.

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*Note that the following has been rendered into words, as the actual report is quite unintelligible to non-Borg.

Status Report, Cube #347

This sub-collective has found evidence of species #8511 in system Beta Beta 45a. One unpiloted ship, a primitive robotic survey vessel, was found in close solar orbit. Metal and energy analysis is consistent with that of original intruder vessel, especially the use of a forward mounted warp drive. Records were unable to be recovered due to age of vessel, but the obviously ancient hull points to the home system, or at least colonies, to be found within fifty light years.

We are now enroute to examine the first of twenty-seven target systems.

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"Sir," called Ensign Gloria Frost, a new and enthusiastic transfer to the Secondprize, "we are coming up on the Deni Alpha star system now." Ensign Frost craned her neck to try to see the command chair. "Sir?"

Captain Rydell awoke with a snort. His arm and neck ached from the awkward position they had been locked in since he had dozed off approximately an hour before. Blinking in the

bright lights of the bridge, Rydell stood up and stretched, then straightened his shirt where it had ridden up. "Come again?"

"Deni Alpha system, Captain. We have arrived."

"Oh. Joy. Up on screen, please."

Lieutenant Cecil Davis punched at a few buttons. The game of "Breakout" he had been playing on his console was safely saved. A second round of button pushing brought up the oh-so-exciting view of Deni Alpha.

A reddish-tinged star of ancient lineage glowed in the distance. Several miscellaneous planets orbited the star with their moons, but the screen showed none of them. Instead, rocks tumbled about in their silent dance. Big rocks, little rocks, red rocks, black rocks, all manner of rocks. An asteroid belt to be exact.

Archeologists had determined the asteroids had once been three manufactured terrestrial planets, set into stable orbit about the primary. A million years ago, some disaster had caused the unknown race to go extinct, and the planets had suffered, breaking up into the mess seen on the viewscreen. Because of their previously manufactured state (quite beyond the abilities of Starfleet), the asteroids were a hodgepodge of exotic minerals; miners were kept away by the simple matter of the beacon which indicated the system was indicted, and threatened serious a**-shooting should any ship trespass.

"Wow. Just as amazing as when I read the reports." Sarcasm dripped from Rydell's voice. "Definite stretch of the talent on this ship to play with rocks." Unfortunately, that statement was probably true. "Well, we might as well begin. Ensign, um, Frost, wake up Jaroch and Dillon and tell them to come to the bridge; and then inform Baird that the tests will begin within the hour. I'll be in my ready room."

Rydell wandered off to his ready room for a cup of hot chocolate and perhaps fifteen minutes more of a nap, not necessarily in that order. Lieutenant Davis watched the captain go, then returned to his game. On the screen, rocks continued their silent dance.

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Exploratory-class Cube #347 entered the second of the twenty-seven systems it was surveying. If the previous star had been unpromising, then this one was even more so; at least the other /had/ three planets, even if they were all gas giants. This one only held asteroids, most of them bunched into two rings. In the ship, a moderate amount of chaos was occurring.

{We don't care! We refuse to listen to Klingon opera! It gives us a headache.}

{But Klingon opera gets the battle instincts going. We say Klingon opera! Motivation!}

{No, no, no, no, no! No Klingon opera. If you do try it, we'll make sure every relay on this cube fries, even if it means my hierarchy will be making repairs for the next month.}

The first voice of the argument belonged to Delta A & B, the one-minded Borg in two bodies. She was the current head of the Engineering hierarchy, and absolutely despised Klingon opera. Anything but Klingon opera.

The second voice came from Weapons, who felt Klingon opera should be mandatory background music at all times. Many of the drones in his hierarchy also preferred opera, mainly because the strength of the mind in charge influenced their decisions.

Captain listened to the discussion, which was becoming increasingly hostile, with only a part of his attention. Unfortunately, the intranets were beginning to slow as both brought more resources on-line. The simple subject of what music the sub-collective should listen to

underscored the general instability of the cube. In the first place, no Borg sub-collective would be having what was essentially an argument with itself because music was irrelevant; and even if it wasn't, the hive mind was supposed to be one, not displaying the schizoid tendencies that epitomized Cube #347.

A small voice in the roaring sea spoke up, {What about one of those arias from species #411?}

{NO!} came the reply from both Delta and Weapons. 19 of 27 urked, and went quiet again.

Unsuccessfully attempting to block out the noise, Captain slowed the cube from high impulse, coordinating the slide into orbit about the primary in the gap between the two asteroid belts. The space wasn't quite clear of rock, as evidenced a minute later as one of the smaller chucks slammed into the shields. The smack was felt by the drones in the cube as a sharp punch, which momentarily halted the music argument. Captain cursed, then slightly altered the orbit to take the ship above the plain and away from the majority of the debris.

{No damage reported,} chimed in Delta, {yet, that is.} The last was directed not at Captain, but along the nets towards Weapons. Weapons was just about to respond, when Captain sent painful metal surges along the net to quiet them.

{Pick an integral number between one and ten,} ordered Captain.

{Seven,} returned Weapons.

{Two,} said Delta.

Captain tripped the random number generator of the Borg ship's computer, then read back the response. {Six. Weapons gets to choose the music.}

{Good. Klingon opera.}

Over the loudspeakers of the cube, the strains of Klingon opera rang out. Heavy percussion thumped a stately beat. In the Engineering sections surrounding the various energy cores, the intercom system spontaneously shorted out. Captain glanced up at the speaker nearest his alcove and a similar action happened, followed by the one in the local nodal intersection.

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"Rydell to Engineering, is the deflector dish ready to go?"

"Yes it is, although in my estimation, it is seriously f***ed up. Assuming the first test doesn't blow out all the power relays on this ship, the f***ing 'modifications' the sh**head techies on that Starbase did guarantee I'll be screwing around recalibrating the dish until Hell freezes over when they remove their crap," responded Commander Baird from Engineering.

Commander Dillon had a look on his face which most would say meant he was mildly constipated, although those that knew him would say that the expression was normal when he didn't understand something, but was attempting to appear that he did. Dillon was talking to Jaroch, to the latter's disapproval, "So...this energy beam thingy will do what? I think I have it now, but maybe if you go over it one more time."

Lieutenant Commander Jaroch completed the statement in his mind with '...in words of two syllables or less.' Feeling extremely perverse, he wound up his mind for a good ol'-fashioned round of technobabble. "Please listen carefully. The beam which will originate from the deflector dish is actually a specifically polarized form of energy related to transporter and replicator technologies. The beam takes the surface molecular layer of matter on the object we aim at and converts it to a similar depth layer of another material. Because of bandwidth and hardware

limitations, one can only transmute into a preset second substance. In this case, we will be altering the surface of asteroids with a molecular layer of 'paint'. The 'paint' has the properties of absorbing subspace radio bands at the exact frequency the Borg Collective communicates on, thus theoretically cutting any cube it is used on off from the hive. Without the leadership of the Collective, the drones should become confused, which may allow our battleships to actually destroy a cube.

"The purpose of this assignment is two-fold. One, to field test the deflector modifications, success of which is primarily determined by the Secondprize not blowing up. And two, observe what effects, if any, the beam and molecular paint may have on various substances, hence our being here in this particular system."

A blank look had come to Dillon's face, replacing the expression of constipation. Jaroch gave a toothy smile, "Understand?"

"Um, yes. Of course I do. I just wanted to make sure you understood, as you will be the one monitoring the tests."

"Of course. Now, could you go observe me elsewhere, as I do need to finish the sensor alignments." Actually, Jaroch had readied the sensors the day before, but Dillon was efficiently getting on his nerves. Dillon sulkily walked away, making his way to his chair.

"If you two are done? I think it is time to begin." Rydell sat down in the command chair. Reaching behind it, he fished out an old-fashioned joystick, which he plugged into one armrest. "Computer, load tactical program Rydell Beta."

On the viewscreen a series of gridlines wavered into view. Asteroids of various compositions were outlined in reds, blues, and greens, as well as a myriad of other colors. A target sight sat in the middle of the screen, but began to obediently move as Rydell jiggled the handle of the joystick. "Well, assuming we don't explode the first time we use the deflector dish, at least I'll get to have a little bit of fun."

Dillon protested, "That's not fair! You get to have all the fun."

"This is my ship. I am the captain. Therefore, of course I get to have all the fun. It's in the regulations."

Dillon began to pout as Rydell pointed the crosshairs at a purple tinged asteroid and pushed the large red button.

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Sensors tasted her way through the sensor data stream. Ores of various types were sour, sweet, bitter, salty, savory, [chewy], or some combination thereof. Metallic tangs bit sharply. The system's primary glowed in the frequencies of hydrogen and helium and smelt like a rotting fruit. Fleeting streaks of energy particles bled orange and green flares; and the smack of one asteroid into another was a shattering clash of cymbals. Examining the wealth of data before her, Sensors came to a conclusion.

{Sensors reports there is no sign of the target species. There is no [eyeballs] of any species visiting this system recently. Also to [hiccup] by Sensors is several bolonite asteroids located in the inner ring.}

Captain received the message, allowing it to filter into the consciousness of the rest of the cube. The untranslatable portions were approximated to the most likely meaning. No species #8511, but bolonite ore was a nice find. Properly processed bolonite produced lambda particles, which had some very unique properties. Unlike the enigmatic omega particles, which were

potentially a perfect energy source mixed in a very dangerous package, lambda particles were quite tame. A few assimilated species had theories concerning the phenomenon of lambda traveling vast distances in short periods of time by briefly leaving the universe, but bolonite ore was rare enough that the Collective had been unable to experiment extensively. Therefore, there was a moderate-level priority to find mineral.

{Give us control of the tractors, Weapons,} came from Delta. {This hierarchy will capture the ore.}

{Tractors are the priority of Weapons.}

{In battle, yes. This isn't battle. The asteroid isn't going to fight back.}

{One can never be too sure.}

{Give it a break, you two!} grumbled Captain. He began maneuvers to bring the cube within range of a relatively small chunk of the target ore. {Weapons, disengage from the tractors and give control to Delta.}

In a matter much akin to the right hand of a being not wanting to relinquish some tool to the left hand of the same being, Weapons slowly complied. Delta's hierarchy deftly charged the tractor beams along one edge of the cube and grabbed for the asteroid.

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"Yeehaw, got another one. It is so nice when they can't fight back, isn't it?" Rydell exclaimed, enveloping an asteroid with a yellow aura in a beam from the deflector.

Jaroch scarcely looked up from his instruments. "Nominal reaction. Just like the other twenty rocks we've blasted. Jaroch to Engineering, how is the deflector holding up down there?"

"We've not gone boom yet, if that is what you mean. The relays are starting to fry; and it smells like burnt doghair down here, which means something's f***ed up the air recyclers. The ship can probably hold together for ten or so more bursts, but after that, I say we go back to Starbase 12 and offload the sh**," Baird said back. Around him in Engineering, people bustled about. The smell of burnt doghair was becoming stronger.

Rydell looked back over his shoulder, "Game about over. Oh well. What have we not hit yet?"

"Try one of the blue ones, sir. The sensors are calling it bolonite. Or perhaps one of the black ones, which are basalt."

Dillon looked immensely bored. "Captain, please let me try it, just this once?"

"No, Number One, and that is final. No matter how much you whine, I am the one who gets to play." Rydell aimed the crosshairs at a blue-lined rock, then pushed the red button. A bright flash of white lanced out, squarely hitting the rock. On the asteroid, the top layer of mineral altered its atomic structure. By the naked eyes viewing the demonstration, nothing much had happened, except the asteroid was now rotating a bit faster.

Jaroch watched the squiggles on his terminal continue their monotonous jiggling, and was about to ask Rydell to toast the black rock, when something odd happened. A pair of lines jumped about in an odd pattern, then settled back to normal. "Captain, could you blast that asteroid again? Something occurred, and I want to see if it happens again."

Rydell targeted the rock again and fired. Then, just for kicks, fired a second time. Jaroch watched the wiggles on his screen jigger again, then suddenly chaos broke out with the unasked for shot.

"Um, sir. We might want to back away."

"Why?"

"See the way the rocks nearest the target have begun to become all wavy? Unless we want to send the Secondprize into an unknown spatial phenomenon, I think we should move away."

"Oh. Yes, I agree. Lieutenant Davis, put some distance between us and the distortion."

The Secondprize swung about and then moved off several thousand kilometers before slowing to face the target rock again. The central area was now lost in a region of haziness akin to the viewing of some object which sits on hot desert sand.

Jaroch watched the sensor data for several more minutes. "Well, the good news is that it isn't spreading, and it's only reading as a spatial phenomenon...no temporal effects at all. The bad news is that the rip in space is going to take several days to dissipate."

Rydell frowned, "Well, that's just dandy. Starfleet is going to have our hide for punching holes in space-time, even if it is the fault of the equipment they installed on this ship."

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Cube #347 carefully held onto the chunk of bolonite, slowing its rotation until it was stationary. Inside the ship, a cargo area was cleared of various materials which was the raw scrap used by the cube in its self-repair. Finally satisfied, Captain gave the command to proceed. A transporter locked on the mineral sample, beaming it to the prepared cargo hold in a flourish of green.

Around the ship, space ripped, and Exploratory-class Cube #347 fell through.

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Jaroch monitored the distortion. A recently discovered side-effect was that communications with Starfleet was intermittent at best. Other interesting, but relatively harmless, spatial phenomenon could be seen on the terminal in various subspace frequencies. Overall, as long as the Secondprize did not actually go within a thousand kilometers of the original bolonite asteroid, everything would be fine. Life within the last hour had settled back to a routine monotony. Then...

"Oh, crap. Crap. Crap. Crap. Crap. Sh**. Sh**. Sh**. Sh**. Sh**."

Dillon, sitting in the command chair because Rydell had taken off when it was apparent there wouldn't be any more asteroid arcade games, looked up from the PADD he had been reading. It was true, there was a regulation which said only captains were allowed to have fun; and he had just gotten to some other interesting rules which he had somehow forgotten (such as the one requiring second-in-commands to bring any required drink to a ship's ranking science officer), when Jaroch's increasingly loud cursing came to his attention.

"We are f***ed. We are f***ed. We are f***ed."

"Practicing to have an argument with Baird? What is going on?"

Jaroch simply looked at Dillon, then mutely changed the view of the viewscreen to high magnification. Sitting in the center of the spatial distortion was a Borg cube.

"I see. We are screwed, aren't we?"

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The power supply in the cube skipped, then came fully back on-line. One redundant reactor had died, but the main core and all other backup systems remained stable. The question of 'What happened?' echoed about the net.

Captain steadied himself against a railing. He, along with the rest of the cube, could feel the always-present bond with the Collective suddenly become weaker than usual, as if the ship had traveled an immense distance. While Delta dispatched members of her hierarchy to begin repairs in the ship which self-repair could not handle, Captain initiated the task of finding out where they were. The answer which was determined several minutes later after tedious triangulation of known pulsar and variable stars was not encouraging. Somehow the cube had traveled many tens of thousands of light years and was in the middle of Federation territory.

{Aw [bees]. [Bees]. [Bees]. [Bees]. [Bees]. [Bees]. Sensors thinks we have a very big problem,} spoke up the insectoid Borg into the net to Captain. {Sensors sees a Federation starship fifteen hundred kilometers from our present location. It is stationary. There is the [mosquito] suspicion Sensors has that this Federation ship may have been expecting us.}

Panic among the drones of Cube #347 began to set in. Weapons charged phasers and locked torpedoes and energy projectiles into launching tubes, or at least he tried. It took several precious seconds to reorganize his hierarchy, heading off potential incoordination among the subsectors. Taking advantage of the lag in response, Captain awoke Second from his alcove, and both headed towards the nodal intersection nearest their location.

The intersection had been slightly modified to suit Captain's wants. Instead of a normal Borg terminal, a large viewscreen salvaged from a captured ship had been installed. Captain twitched the data flow to show sensor data on the screen. Up came a picture streaked with screaming yellow, vibrant orange, and shocking pink. Shapes which may or may not have been asteroids tumbled about, surrounded by faintly sparkly auras. A blinking maroon spot sat in the upper right corner.

Captain send a reprimand to Sensors, who immediately altered the grid to show an enhanced visual scene. The asteroid shapes were in fact asteroids; and the streaking colors disappeared. The maroon shape resolved itself into a Federation ship. A little fiddling with the picture centered the ship and magnified it.

Delving into Borg memory, a ship class came up - Excelsior. This was followed by crew compliment, armament, propulsion, and other necessary facts. The registration was unfamiliar, but then again, it had been awhile since the Borg had assimilated a Starfleeter which might have such information.

In a way, this was bad. Despite the old configuration of the Federation ship, that datum alone suggested it was fairly new. And coupled with the reality that the ship had been apparently waiting for the cube to appear pointed towards an ace crew testing new weaponry to further their resistance to assimilation. Or at least that was the consensus the sub-collective reached. As if to prove the conclusion, the deflector dish of the Excelsior-class starship lit up and shot a beam of energy at the cube, enveloping it.

The tenacious link with the Greater Consciousness was lost. Cube #347 was truly alone now.

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Rydell was in Seven Backwards, enjoying a quick drink. Trinian was also there, listening with a slightly bored expression as the captain complained about some trifle. Rydell was just

about to relate how he had managed to survive the pain of a certain papercut when Trinian's eyes widened.

"Um...just thought of something I need to do," Trinian hurriedly said before she grabbed a towel, leapt over the bar counter, and ran out the lounge's doors.

Rydell watched Trinian go. "My story wasn't that bad, was it? And I was just getting to the good part." He was just about to take another sip of his drink when his communicator beeped. "Dillon to Captain Rydell, we, um, have a little problem here."

"What is it? You have aspirations to be a captain, so you should be able to take care of 'little problems'. I'm sorta busy right now."

"This little problem is shaped like a cube, sir."

"I'll be right there."

Rydell impatiently waited for the turbolift doors to open and let him onto the bridge. When they finally did so, he was greeted to a bright flash of light coming from the viewscreen, which quickly died. The deflector dish weapon had been fired.

"Did we get it?" asked Dillon to Jaroch, not noticing Rydell's entrance.

Jaroch nodded, "Looks like it, although it doesn't seem to have had much effect."

"How so?"

"Well, according to theory, the cube should be disorganized after getting painted, and so should just sit there. This cube is moving away at high impulse to the opposite side of the system."

Rydell spoke up, "Dillon, get out of my chair. Lieutenant Davis, plot us a course in the opposite direction. We can raise Starfleet and watch that cube from the side of the system farthest from the Borg. If it comes after us, it'll be easier to escape that way."

No one disagreed with that last statement.

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The Federation R&D ship rapidly took off in the direction opposite of Cube #347. No warp, therefore the obvious conclusion was that the enemy was planning to watch the effects of their horrendous new weapon from a distance. Captain wanted to put as much distance as possible between the cube and the Starfleet ship, in case a quick escape was warranted. Satisfied for the moment, Captain split the sub-collective into two partitions, one tasked to figure out what the weapon was, and the other to plan a way to get back to BorgSpace which didn't rely on a year at high transwarp.

Delta, spokesdrone for the weaponry problem, offered a solution first. {The beam altered the top molecular layer of the cube, turning into an exotic material which dampens out subspace communication on the frequency of the Collective. As long as units are inside the ship, we are okay, but we are insulated from the Greater Consciousness.

{Fortunately, it will be easy to remove. Unfortunately, it will require many days of washing hydrochloric acid over every square centimeter of the hull. Once a quarter of the hull surface is cleaned, we will regain contact, but full contact will require at least three-fourths of the material dissolved.}

{Wonderful,} dryly returned Captain. {So we are essentially cut off for the next several days. Can we at least communicate in other frequencies?}

{Yes, but who would we talk to? Assuming we could cut through the static the distortion

is emitting, the next nearest cube is several thousand light years distant, and I'm sure the Federation ship would not be offering help with our dilemma anytime soon.}

Captain collapsed Delta's partition into the other, adding greater computational power to figure out how to get home. About ten minutes later, Second was ready to report.

{Good news?}

{In a vague sense of the word. We can get back to where we began, at least in theory.

The distortion is emitting high levels of lambda particles...}

{Tastes like [plontaus],} interrupted Sensors. She was hushed.

{...several of which have signatures consistent with the Delta quadrant, which indicates there is still a tunnel back. Unfortunately, the door is closed, and we need a key to get back.}

The plan began to unfold within the sub-collective's mind. The bolonite asteroid captured earlier would be half of the key...but the energy weapon of the Federation ship was the other half. And the consensus concluded the Starfleet ship wouldn't help without a fight. The cube transported the rock to the outside, tractorred it so that it would be dragged along behind, then carefully began to stalk its prey.

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Rydell leaned back in his chair in the ready room. On the other side of the desk stood Dillon, Jaroch, and Lieutenant Hawkins. As Baird came through the doors, Rydell sat up.

"Starfleet hates us. That is the only conclusion I can draw."

The four standing looked at each other in an 'oh-oh' expression.

"I finally managed to raise Starfleet though the distortion's interference. They can manage to get additional ships here no sooner than thirty-six hours. In the meantime we are supposed to observe the cube. If it leaves the system, we will follow it."

"And if it attacks us?" asked Dillon.

"We are supposed to fight back and try to disable the propulsion."

"We're f***ed, aren't we." The rhetorical question came from Baird. Rydell was about to answer anyway when the communicator chimed, "Bridge to Captain Rydell, the cube is moving towards us."

"F***ed," repeated Baird.

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An outsider's view of the unfolding events would bring puzzlement, and a sense of irony. On one side, the Borg cube. It sped towards the Federation ship, Delta quadrant bolonite asteroid in tow. Occasionally it wobbled in its course as individual subsections attempted to gain control of engines in order to flee. With each wobble, Captain swiftly reprimanded the subsection, although his thoughts revolved about the increasingly favorable option of a year in transwarp.

On the other side, the USS Secondprize. The Federation ship moved towards the Borg cube at moderate impulse. More than anything else, the crew wanted to turn tail and run. "Renegade Pirate Ship Avoiding Court-Marshall" sounded like a tabloid title to be proud of...or the plot of a cheesy sci-fi epic.

The hypothetical outside viewer at this point would probably make some popcorn and sit down in the sofa, all the better to watch the lightshow to come.

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"Raise shields, rotating modulated frequencies. Ready phasers and prepare to switch frequencies on them. Load torpedoes."

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{Weapons, understand...tractors only! And use of weapons is to disarm. We need the ship intact for the deflector dish. Assimilation, because any drone beamed to the Federation ship will lose contact with this sub-collective, we need to break into their computers for deflector control. That is the job of your hierarchy. Sensors, keep an eye on that distortion...and watch for reinforcements.}

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Cube #347 and Federation vessel Secondprize closed the distance between each other like a galactic game of chicken. At the last moment, Secondprize veered off, raking the side of the cube with a volley of torpedoes and a double-blast of phasers. No damage. Within the same time frame, the cube lashed out a series of tractor beams, but the changing frequencies of the Secondprize's shields foiled the attempt. Each ship slowed to a halt, turned, and hesitantly attacked again.

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Delta and Weapons cheered together, {Got it! Got it!} Delta continued, {The Federation ship is tractored. The modulations of the shields was difficult to overcome, but applying six different tractors at once captured it. No damage to the cube yet.}

Captain sent acknowledgment. At least it only took six passes, which was decent for this sub-collective. Even better news, no other Federation vessel had appeared. As he turned the cube to head back towards the distortion, Captain activated the subspace radio and sent a hail to the captured ship. The exchange to come was already playing out in his mind, but Assimilation needed a frequency to piggyback to get into the other ship's computers.

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"The Borg cube is hailing us, sir," said Hawkins.

"On screen."

The image of catwalks and alcoves filled the viewscreen; and the voice of the Collective spoke from the speakers, "We are the Borg. Resistance is futile. You will prepare to be boarded and assimilated."

"No way. I don't think so. In moments, fifty fully armed battleships will be in this system. Fifty I tell you, so you'd better let us go!" bluffed Rydell.

The voice of the Collective was silent, but some other noise was playing on the speakers. Singing and a rhythmic drumming? Before the faint noise could be identified, the Collective spoke again. "Irrelevant. No warp signatures are detected."

"Um. New technology. I meant fifty /cloaked/ ships. Fifty ships with phasers a'blazing." Hawkins frantically waved for Rydell's attention. "Sir, unusual core activity. The Borg are in our computers."

"Well, cut the connection then! And try to get us out of the tractor beam. And if that works, turn tail and get us out of here, Starfleet orders be damned!"

Jaroch frowned, "I could have sworn that was Klingon opera."

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The bodiless observer cheered! More action! The Secondprize powered its phasers and finally managed to break the hold of one tractor beam. Unfortunately, Borg standard operating procedure had changed quite a bit in the last year, and now a minimum of four beams was used to hold a Starfleet vessel. Before the Secondprize could try to destroy another emitter, Cube #347 lanced with a phaser of its own. The upper phaser banks of the Secondprize dissolved in a molten slag. For good measure, a similar operation was performed on the lower phaser banks.

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In Cube #347, controlled chaos reigned. Throughout the nets and within hierarchies, thought impulses raced.

Assimilation: {Through top-level security. Feints activated. Secondprize computer attempting to block. Subspace link maintained...how depressing.}

Delta: {Minor damage to submatrix about emitter #3. Ship systems compensating.}

Doctor: {Drone maintenance docket registers three. Two additional units placed in temporary stasis until such time viability appraisal can be undertaken.}

Weapons: {Come on...let me have command codes back! I wasn't targeting the bridge, I wasn't! Give the weaponry codes!}

Second: {Weaponry codes are released. Don't you dare power up the phasers.}

Sensors: {Spatial distortion remains stable. No sign of the reputed fifty Federation warships.}

Captain subtly directed the duties of the crew, overseeing and forcing consensus in the hierarchies as warranted. His head ached, and if he bothered to open his eye, the world would have been a blurry place. His mind flitted among the terrains of the net, meshing hierarchies, MAKING the individuals of the ship function with something approaching Borg efficiency, although not quite.

Suddenly Assimilation announced, voice more animated than usual, {Codes for deflector dish found and broken. We have control now.} Captain acknowledged and sent the command to bring the asteroid into position.

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All was going to Hell is a very large, cube-shaped handbasket. One emitter on the Borg ship had been destroyed, but so had most of the phaser banks on the Secondprize. On the bright side, there were no casualties and relatively few injuries. Conversely, when the Borg got around to it, the drones they would be getting would be whole. Rydell was not having a Good Day.

Lieutenant Hawkins shouted, "The Collective is in the computer. It's tearing things apart."

The Borg have...deflector control?"

Dillon was curled in fetal position on the floor, whimpering that he didn't want to be Borgified. Rydell suppressed the urge to kick his first officer in the head to knock a little sense into it.

"Deflector warming up!" shouted Jaroch. "It is targeting something!"

Helpless to prevent anything, the crew watched as a large asteroid was swung around from the back side of the cube, pulled into position by a tractor beam. When it was aligned with the deflector, the Secondprize gave a shudder as a large amount of energy was pushed through the dish; lights on the bridge flicked. The rock was enveloped in the beam.

Just when it couldn't get much worse, the Borg ship began to turn away, dropping the tractors which held the Secondprize. Flung away into a nauseating spiral, the suddenly green-at-the-gills (those who were still conscious) crew did not see Cube #347's escape.

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Captain sped the cube back towards the spatial distortion, successfully energized asteroid held out before it. The Federation ship had been dropped: it was useless now, and Captain did not want to take the time to either assimilate it or destroy it. The passage back to BorgSpace was much more important.

As the cube approached the distortion, the captured asteroid began to glow. The closer it came, the brighter it glowed. As the center of the distortion was reached, Alpha quadrant-derived bolonite intersected with Delta quadrant-derived, ripping through the already weak fabric of space-time. Through the hole fell Cube #347.

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Stardate: I Really Don't Care
Captain's Log, USS Secondprize

After all that, we are still alive and unassimilated. By the time we had managed to get the Secondprize on an even keel, the Borg cube was quite gone, so we high-tailed it too. The Secondprize could only make warp 2, but that was fast enough.

I've sent in my report to Starfleet concerning their little toy. In it I highlighted two observations:

(1) When the energy beam 'painted' the bolonite asteroid, it opened a tear in space-time; and somehow that tear appeared to have /attracted/ a Borg cube.

(2) The insulating property promised by R&D to isolate the cube from the general Collective obviously didn't work. No hint of confusion I could see. We seriously got our butts whipped.

My final recommendation is that the deflector protocols are tossed in the nearest singularity.

Anyway, we are enroute to Starbase 12, where the deflector modifications will be removed. At the same time, there will be a general repair session; I think the phaser banks are going to have to be completely removed and new ones installed. The air recyclers are rather nasty as well. I would push for a new paint job, but that might be a bit much. The crew will have at least a two week shore leave; well, most of the crew. Baird is going to spend his leave cursing

at the R&D techies, I suppose.

One final note to myself...Jaroch was right. I think that was Klingon opera playing the background when the Borg were talking to us.

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Status Report, Cube #347

We apologize for our absence from the Greater Consciousness and whatever stress it may have caused. Due to forces beyond this sub-collective's control, we lost the subspace link. The Federation has potentially stumbled onto a new technology it must not be allowed to develop.

We must also report a small supply of bolonite ore in system Gamma 3d. The ore is exceptionally pure.

No sign of species #8511, however, and we thus continue our task.